

**Creating a Wondrous Life: Introduction to Literature in a Global and Multi-cultural Context**  
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**Why English 190, Introduction to Literature?**

Students in English 190, Introduction to Literature, vary significantly in age, experience reading literature and cultural backgrounds. However, all students can recite hundreds of song lyrics from memory, or explain complex narrative points of view from their favorite TV shows. Typically, the course focuses on types of literature: poems, stories, and drama. The reading list is already globalized: It includes literature of multilingual, multicultural contexts, especially such authors and works as Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jamaica Kinkaid, Edwidge Danticat, haiku poetry, Salman Rushdie, Bharati Mukherjee, and Jhumpa Lahiri.

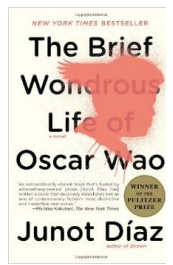
**What is the Wondrous Idea?**

The module situates literature in global culture to show that individual texts do not simply represent universal types of creative writing, but instead express (and critique) a specific cultural context or contexts. In fact, most, if not all, literary works represent and illuminate cross-cultural perspectives: complex cultural

overlays and mixtures of languages, ethnicities, history, and popular sub-cultures. The module takes advantage of cultural knowledge not just about literary works and forms, but also in broader areas of global culture in shared popular culture as well as students' own backgrounds based on age, ethnicity, nationality, and gender.

**How Can the Promise Be Achieved?**

To create a globalized module that supports my students in the global outcomes of self-awareness, perspective taking, and cultural diversity, I will replace the novella students typically read, Charles Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, with the contemporary novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* by Junot Díaz. The novel not only blends English and Spanish languages and United States and Dominican cultures, but also includes a context of popular culture references to fantasy literature and graphic novels. I anticipate that this mixture of ethnic and popular cultures, although difficult to decode, will appeal to students' own sense of themselves. However, this text also emphasizes the importance of symbolism and detailed description to literary interpretation, so it suits the purpose of the introductory literature course outcomes that focus on literary terminology and types or genres of literature.



**What are the Key Global Competencies for a Wondrous Life?**

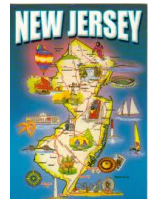
The global competencies for this course reflect, as the course does generally, the development of a personal intellectual and analytic orientation to culture through literature.

- Global Self-Awareness: Identifies some connections between an individual's personal decision-making and certain local and global issues.
- Perspective Taking: Identifies and explains multiple perspectives (such as cultural, disciplinary, and ethical) when exploring subjects within natural and human systems.
- Cultural Diversity: Analyzes substantial connections between the worldviews, power structures, and experiences of multiple cultures historically or in contemporary contexts, incorporating respectful interactions with other cultures.



**How Will the Students Learn and What Will They Take Away?**

The activities of the course focus specifically on ways that students can develop metacognitive skills to enhance their own understanding of ethnic, national, and popular cultures in a global context based on sources provided about *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.



- Students will complete short in-class writings to explore personal cultural contexts, focusing on ways that writing encourages metacognition about both text and context.
- Students will practice designing their own metacognitive questions about writings and other artifacts of global and multicultural contexts in art, music, biography, and other cultural forms.
- Students will be asked to attend at least one cultural event or visit one museum that relates to the globalized module or to their own cultural investigation.
- Students will work in groups to present information about their globalized contextual research on a work of literature that is already part of the class and one of their own choosing.